

Latest criminal charge in hockey highlights changing attitudes



The fact that police have charged a youth hockey player with assault with a weapon following an incident on the ice is another indication of how attitudes toward violence and the game have changed, says Toronto civil litigator [Sarah O'Connor](#).

"This is the first time that an assault charge has been laid when it isn't related to fighting," she tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#). "What happens on the ice doesn't necessarily stay on the ice and behaviour during the game can have serious repercussions."

O'Connor, principal of [O'Connor Richardson Professional Corporation](#), notes how attitudes around fighting in hockey — and in sport in general — have been changing since Todd Bertuzzi delivered a from-behind blow that ended the pro career of rookie hockey player Steve Moore a decade ago.

"That seemed to be the turning point because fights in hockey are now subject to assault charges in the Criminal Code," she says.

O'Connor makes the comments after Middlesex OPP charged a youth over a fight during a game.

Officers say they were contacted about the incident this month after one player allegedly struck another in the helmet with a hockey stick from behind, reports [Talk Radio A.M. 640](#).

No injuries were reported, but the OPP said the investigation revealed the hit was intentional and "unrelated to the play in the game," says the radio station article. Police haven't released where the alleged incident occurred, it says.

Middlesex OPP have charged the male youth with assault with a weapon; the youth cannot be identified under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, says the article.

O'Connor says the fact that police have charged the youth with assault with a weapon isn't shocking at all given the stance all levels of hockey have taken against violence during the game. But, she says, "It is still surprising that the youth would be charged with assault with a weapon as it is a more serious offence."

Since the alleged incident, Middlesex OPP are reminding players involved in all sports to conduct themselves properly, saying if bad behaviour meets the threshold of a criminal offence, the player may face criminal charges, says the article.

O'Connor says the case really is another wake-up for kids, parents, coaches and all players to the fact that there are rules of conduct about appropriate behaviour.

"And once you breach those rules of conduct, the criminal law kicks in — and just because someone is wearing a helmet doesn't mean it's not an assault," she says.

O'Connor says these types of incidents also open the door to potential civil lawsuits.

"Once players move past the rules of conduct and cause an injury they are opening themselves up to criminal charges and civil lawsuits," she says. "Change is going to start with coaches, parents and refs. Everybody wants to be competitive and be the next big star but there are ways to go about it to highlight one's skills as opposed to being a bully."